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Guide to Editorial Placement

Most newspapers feature an “Op-Ed” and “Letters to the Editor” section in which readers’ and public figures can express viewpoints and/or respond to particular news events. An Op-Ed is generally a short (600 – 800 words) article expressing an opinion or viewpoint on a timely news topic. A letter to the editor is a very short (150 – 200 words) response to an article that recently appeared in the publication.

The Op-Ed and Letters to the Editor sections are almost always the most widely read sections of the newspaper. Publication of an op-ed or letter will assure your views will reach many people.

Op-Eds

The following pointers will help you get your op-ed piece published:

- **Find a news hook.** Editors need a reason why your viewpoint should be given attention right now. The release of a significant study by PNHP or some other source, annual events (such as new health spending figures or the yearly release of the number of uninsured), or responses to recently published articles are all good reasons.
- **Know the word limit.** Newspapers have limited space, and editors don’t have the time to cut your piece down to size. In general, 750 to 800 words will do, but check the paper’s op-ed page to find out their preference.
- **Make a single point.** You only have 750 to 800 words. Make one point clearly and persuasively.
- **Avoid jargon.** Simple language ensures that all readers, even non-experts, can understand your point. For example, don’t use acronyms or “policy wonk” language.
- **“Humanize” your article.** Illustrations, anecdotes and personal stories help explain and bring complicated issues to life. Think about your personal experiences as a physician in the community and how single-payer would improve things.
- **Make a specific recommendation.** This is an opinion piece. State your opinion on how to improve matters.
- **Draw the reader in, but get to the point.** Your first paragraph should draw the reader in by using a dramatic vignette or a well-stated argument. If you choose to open with an anecdote or other device, make sure you quickly get to the point.

- **End with a bang.** Your final paragraph is as important as your opening paragraph. Be sure to summarize your argument in one strong final paragraph.
- **Follow up.** Most op-ed editors will respond to you within a week. If you haven't heard in that time frame or if your piece is particularly time sensitive, you can make one follow-up phone call to be sure it was received and ask about its status.

Make sure your article is double-spaced with wide margins. List your name, address, phone, fax and e-mail contact information at the top of the piece. Find out from your local paper the best way to send an op-ed. Instructions for submitting an op-ed are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear or on the paper's Web site. Some papers like them mailed, others prefer faxes, while others favor e-mails.

Letters to the Editor

These tips will help:

- **Make one clear argument.** The piece should be in favor of or critical of a particular position taken by the paper or described in an article.
- **Be specific.** The letter should focus on a specific issue that was raised in an article or opinion piece.
- **Cite the article.** Be sure to mention the title and date of the article you're responding to in one of your first two sentences. For example "Dear Editor, Your recent coverage of the issue of the uninsured ("Healthcare in America," May 13, 2005) was a thoughtful piece..."
- **Be brief.** Generally, four to six paragraphs are ideal. If you can't contain the piece to that length, consider asking someone to help you edit it or write a 750-word op-ed instead.
- **Follow up.** If you have sent your letter to the editor and haven't heard anything within a week, make a follow-up call to check on its status. Be aware that editors receive hundreds of letters and may not respond to you immediately.

You must include your name, address and daytime phone number in your letter. Instructions for submitting a letter to the editor are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear or on the paper's Web site. Find out from your local paper the best way to send a letter. Some papers like them mailed, others prefer faxes, while others favor e-mails.